Pawan Raina Committee and the Bhaskar Barua Committee which have conducted departmental enquiry; and

(c) if the position contained in (a) and (b) above are correct, what action Government have taken in this regard and the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE(SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV):(a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) The CBI had registered PE No. 1(A)/2001-ACU(VI) and investigated into the alleged irregularities in procurement of computers and Networking equipment under NATP. The CBI's investigation is a sequel to the preliminary investigations carried out by Pawan Raina & Bhaskar Barua Committees. As per the CBI's investigation report the inquiry did not reveal any malafides on the part of any officials of ICAR. Since the allegations have not been proved, the CBI has closed the case.

Export of potatoes

569. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the fact that frequent gluts and unremunerative prices often force potato growers to leave part of their crops unharvested;

(b) whether this is because no new outlets have emerged to gainfully utilize the surplus potato and the potato export potential has not been harnessed;

(c) whether it is a fact that the potato production has increased from 5 million tonnes in 1970 to 25 million tonnes at present; and

(d) if so, the steps Government propose to take, so as to promote export of surplus potato?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE(SHRI HUKUMDEO NARAYAN YADAV):(a) and (b) Yes Sir. The Government is aware of increased production of potato in the country. In order to provide remunerative prices to the farmers, the

Government of India, on the request of the States Concerned, provide financial assistance through Market Intervention Scheme. During 2002-03 the Market Intervention Scheme has been implemented in the States of Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal where, under the scheme, potato has been procured from farmers @ Rs.190 per qtl. and Rs.200 per qtl. respectively.

Besides, with a view to create new outlets for utilizing the surplus potato production, the Government of Uttar Pradesh is providing assistance for transport of potato outside the State @Rs.250 per tonne.

(c) Yes, Sir. The potato production in the country has increased from 4.81 Million Tonnes during 1970-71 to 24.08 Million Tonne in the year 2001-02.

(d) The Government of India, Department of Commerce, through Agriculture and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority have established four potato Agri-Export Zones in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh for promoting export of potato from the country. The State Government of Uttar Pradesh is also providing financial assistance @ Rs.1000 per tonne for facilitating export of potato.

Agricultural growth rate

570. SHRI ABANI ROY: Will the Minister of AGRICULTURE be pleased to state:-

(a) whether the agricultural growth rate registered a decline of 3.2 per cent during 2002-03 against growth of 5.7 per cent in 2001-02;

(b) if so, the factors responsible for a steep fall in agricultural growth rate;

(c) whether new plans have been formulated to increase the growth rate during 2003-04; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?